
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 26

AN ACT EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

SUMMARY:

This bill makes several changes to school readiness program funding, which the state provides through various grants allowing towns to purchase seats for three- to five-year-olds who are too young to attend kindergarten (see BACKGROUND). The bill:

1. expands the competitive grant program for the purchase of school readiness seats from program providers;
2. allows the education commissioner to (a) give preference to towns that increase the number of school readiness seats when awarding competitive grants and (b) use unexpended school readiness funds to develop a plan for providing universal access to school readiness spaces; and
3. increases the state's per-pupil cost reimbursement for school readiness programs from \$8,346 to a minimum of \$8,661, within available appropriations, beginning in FY 15.

The bill expands local school readiness councils' biennial reporting requirements to the State Department of Education (SDE). Under the bill, councils' reports must include the estimated cost of providing school readiness seats to all eligible children, not just children in priority school districts, including the cost for school readiness programs that are in the process of seeking accreditation.

It also requires the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to:

1. create a new plan and grant program designed to achieve universal school readiness access and

2. assume Department of Public Health's (DPH) duties regarding (a) day care licensing and inspection and (b) youth camp regulation.

The bill also makes various technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2014

SCHOOL READINESS FUNDING

§ 1 — *Competitive Grant Program Expansion*

The bill allows alliance district towns that do not contain priority school districts to apply for competitive grants. By law, an alliance district is a school district that is among the 30 lowest when ranked by district performance index, which measures academic performance derived from students' weighted results on statewide mastery tests. A priority school district has students with low standardized test scores and high levels of poverty; there are 15 such districts.

The bill allows competitive grant recipients to use the funds to purchase school readiness seats in programs that are "seeking accreditation." Current law limits these funds to the purchase of seats in accredited programs only. The bill defines programs "seeking accreditation" as those:

1. seeking accreditation from (a) the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), (b) a Head Start on-site program review instrument, or (c) a successor instrument pursuant to federal regulations or
2. attempting to meet criteria established by the education commissioner.

The bill also changes the competitive grant amount for which a town or regional school readiness council may apply. Under current law, the grant may not exceed \$107,000 unless an applicant town has two or more priority schools (see BACKGROUND) in one district. The bill makes this amount a floor, rather than a ceiling, for all towns and councils that apply, including those towns with more than one priority

school. It also requires the education commissioner to give preference when awarding competitive grants to towns that increase the number of school readiness spaces.

The bill allows any town that receives a competitive grant to use it to prepare a facility and staff members for school readiness program operation during the entire five-year grant term. Current law allows competitive grants to be used for such purposes only during the first three years of the grant term.

OEC DUTIES

§ 4 — *School Readiness Universal Access Plan*

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to develop a plan for creating universal access to spaces in school readiness programs that are either accredited or seeking accreditation. The commissioner must submit the plan to the governor by January 1, 2015.

§ 5 — *New School Readiness Grant*

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to establish a new grant program to enable eligible towns and regional school readiness councils to (1) start up new school readiness classrooms and (2) provide spaces to eligible children in school readiness programs that are accredited or seeking accreditation.

The bill defines “eligible towns” as those that (1) contain a priority school or (2) are ranked among the 50 poorest in the state but whose school district is not a priority school district. It defines “eligible regional school readiness councils” as those comprised of two or more towns or school districts that contain a priority school.

It defines “eligible children” as children aged three-to-five years who are too young to enroll in kindergarten but will attend a school readiness program and who live in:

1. an area served by a priority school or former priority school,
2. a town ranked among the 50 poorest but not in a priority school district,

3. a town formerly ranked among the 50 poorest but not in a priority school district, or
4. a town designated as an alliance district with a school district that is not a priority school district.

Towns and children benefitting from this grant are also eligible competitive school readiness grant recipients (see BACKGROUND). The bill does not specify whether a recipient may be awarded both grants, or if receipt of one grant eliminates eligibility for the other.

§§ 6 & 7 — Day Care Licensing

The bill requires OEC, rather than DPH, to conduct licensing of child day care centers, group day care homes, and family day care homes. OEC must:

1. receive license applications,
2. collect licensing fees,
3. require day care staff to submit to criminal history and child abuse records checks, and
4. notify licensees in writing of new regulations adopted by OEC within 60 days after their effective date.

The bill also requires OEC, rather than DPH, to inspect child day care centers, group day care homes, and family day care homes. OEC must:

1. make yearly unannounced visits to all licensed day care centers and group day care homes, rather than biennial visits as required in state regulations;
2. make yearly unannounced visits to all, rather than to one-third, of licensed family day care homes; and
3. require local health directors to inspect all licensed day care centers and group day care homes biennially, as currently

required in state regulations.

Additionally, OEC, rather than DPH, must approve all assistant or substitute staff members who work in family day care homes through an application process.

§§ 8 - 17 — Youth Camp Regulation

The bill transfers youth camp regulation duties from DPH to OEC. These duties include licensing and license revocation, discipline, inspection, investigation, and regulation promulgation. OEC also assumes DPH's authority to accept federal grants or private funds for youth camps.

The bill requires OEC to assume various DPH youth camp licensing duties, including issuance, establishment of application procedures, suspension, and revocation. It also requires OEC to verify the health, safety, and recordkeeping practices of camps prior to issuing or renewing youth camp licenses.

It also allows OEC to take disciplinary action against a licensed youth camp if the camp commits any bad acts listed in current law. OEC disciplinary authority consists of (1) license revocation, suspension, or limitations; (2) daily fines; (3) probationary status with reporting requirements; (4) restrictions on acquiring additional facilities; (5) cease and desist orders against dangerous activity; and (6) court-ordered injunctions against operation.

Under the bill, OEC also assumes all DPH's duties for the license revocation process. The office must issue notice of intent to revoke a youth camp license, hold grievance hearings within 60 days at the licensee's request, and render a written decision about intended licensure action.

The bill requires OEC to inspect youth camp facilities before issuing initial licenses and annually thereafter. Consistent with current law, OEC does not need to inspect facilities located in dormitories, classrooms, or other buildings owned and inspected by a college or university.

It requires OEC to receive and investigate reports and complaints against youth camps. Investigatory duties include administering oaths, issuing subpoenas, and compelling testimony and discovery. OEC must also, when necessary, issue a formal statement of charges when findings indicate that a camp is operating without a license, violating regulations, or endangering children's health, welfare, or safety.

The bill also requires OEC to assume DPH's regulation promulgation authority. It allows OEC to make regulations concerning:

1. safe youth camp operation,
2. physical exams or health status requirements for students attending youth camps, and
3. conditions under which youth camp staff may administer diabetes glucose tests and other medications.

BACKGROUND

School Readiness Program

By law, a "school readiness program" is a nonreligious, SDE-funded education program that provides a developmentally appropriate learning experience of at least 450 hours and 180 days for children between ages three and five who are too young to enroll in kindergarten (CGS § 10-16p(a)(1)).

SDE allocates school readiness funds using two different methods: a school readiness grant program and a competitive grant program. School readiness program grants are given to priority and former priority school districts. Competitive grants are given to (1) areas served by a priority or former priority school and (2) the 50 poorest or formerly poorest towns whose school district is not a priority district (CGS § 10-16p(c)-(d)).

School readiness program providers eligible for SDE funding include local and regional boards of education, regional educational

service centers (RESCs), family resource centers, child day care centers, Head Start programs, and preschool programs (CGS § 10 (b)(1)).

Priority School

A priority school is located in a non-priority district where 40% or more of school lunches served are served to children with family incomes low enough to be eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches (CGS § 10-16p(a)(3)).

Related Bills

sSB 25 and sHB 5043, favorably reported by the Education Committee, also adjust the state's per-pupil cost reimbursement for school readiness programs.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 0 (03/24/2014)